THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

MARVEL 014

FALL OF THE HOUSE OF X

LGY#664

DUGGAN
Di VITO
VALENZA

MARVEL SALUTES
Alison Gill
on her retirement from her legendary 40-year comic book career.
Thank you for contributing to the Marvel Universe and beyond,
one page at a time.

About a decade ago, I was named both the sexiest man alive and one of the richest people in the world.

Those days are gone, but that's not what I lose sleep over when I close my eyes.

I rarely dream of my life as Tony Stark. In my dreams, **I am Iron Man.**

I get my ass kicked all day long, you'd think in my dreams that I would will it to be different, but I still take a beating.

Welcome to my recurring nightmare.

It's by no means funny, but it will make me look like a fool by the time you get to the end of this story.

I'm not a guy who puts much stock into the *meaning* of dreams.

But I know what this one's about…

…it's about failing to save everyone I could have.

Magneto never says a word.

But he does insult me--by bending my bleeding-edge weapon into Earth's oldest one--

--then he kills me with it.

And then I wake up.

AAH!

I spent months developing countermeasures to Magneto--

--designing technology to protect myself--

--now being used against innocents.

I DON'T NEED MY TELEPATHY TO KNOW YOU'RE IN A BAD WAY.

SORRY I WOKE YOU, EMMA.

MY HARDEST BATTLES ARE WHEN I HAVE TOO MUCH TIME TO THINK.

DO YOU WANT TO FORGET?

NO. I USED TO MAKE MYSELF FORGET...

...IT WAS *BAD* FOR ME.

I KNOW MORE THAN ONE WAY TO MAKE A MAN FORGET HIS TROUBLES.

WHAT WERE WE TALKING ABOUT?

I'M SORRY I'VE LEFT YOU TO MANAGE THE KINGPIN, BUT MY CLOCK HAS BEEN DOMINATED BY THE NEW ARMORS--

THIS IS THE ***HELLFIRE CLUB***, ANTHONY. WE'RE ALWAYS ALONE, NO MATTER HOW MANY WARM BODIES YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY.

WHEN THIS IS OVER, I WOULDN'T MIND TRYING TO FIGURE US OUT.

YOU FORGET I'VE SEEN YOUR PLANS. THE ONLY FUTURE PLANNING YOU NEED TO WORRY ABOUT IS SORTING AN URN.

YOU DON'T LIKE OUR ODDS?

OH, I THINK I'M GOING TO BE FINE.

UH-HUH.

YOU, HOWEVER...

...ARE IN TROUBLE.

WHEN MULTIBILLIONAIRE INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK, INVENTOR EXTRAORDINAIRE, DONS HIS SOLAR-CHARGED, STEEL-MESH ARMOR, HE BECOMES A HIGH-TECH WARRIOR–THE WORLD'S GREATEST HUMAN FIGHTING MACHINE!

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS...

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

"HERE BE MANDARIN RINGS"

PREVIOUSLY...

Feilong and the anti-mutant think tank Orchis have used Stark Unlimited to produce mutant-hunting Sentinels with Iron Man technology and forced most of Earth's mutants to flee the planet. Orchis' influence now reaches to the highest positions of power around the world. To fight them, Tony has teamed up with Emma Frost and the Hellfire Club, going so far as to create an alias for Emma as his new wife!

Tony and Emma have stolen the galaxy's largest deposit of mysterium, the priceless mutant metal, for Riri Williams (A.K.A. Ironheart). She and the X-Man Forge are to oversee construction of an armada that can stand against Feilong's Sentinels. Unfortunately, while in outer space, an alien dragon has confronted them about Riri's latest accessory: the Mandarin's rings.

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THOSE RINGS YOU WIELD AS WEAPONS... YOU UNDERSTAND THEM NOT.

THEY ARE NOT RINGS OF POWER. THEY ARE RINGS OF TRAGEDY.

I KNOW WELL OF WHAT I SPEAK, YOUR RINGS EXPLOIT THE SPIRITS OF MY BRETHREN!

HEED MY WORDS, HUMANS... OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES!

DEEP SPACE.

FORGE AND I DON'T LIKE YOUR TONE--

NO, NO, WE'RE LISTENING!

RIGHT, IRONHEART?

YOU MISUNDERSTAND, YOUNG ONE. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME. THE DANGER LIES WITHIN YOU.

EVEN THE PUREST OF HEARTS WILL COMPROMISE IN THE DARKEST OF DAYS.

YOU HAVE TEN CURSES UPON YOU. THEY CANNOT BE CLEANSED--

--AND NEITHER WILL YOU WHEN YOU COMPROMISE YOUR HEART. THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE YOURSELF IS TO DIVEST YOURSELF OF THEM.

BE AT PEACE!

YOU AVENGERS TYPES HAVE NO IDEA HOW GOOD YOU HAVE IT.

WHEN YOU'RE ON THE X-MEN, THE ONLY WINDOW INTO THE FUTURE IS AN ELDERLY WOMAN WEARING A GOLD HELMET AND SPEAKING IN RIDDLES.

SHE'S A BIGGER BUMMER THAN THAT GUY WAS.

I KNEW THE RINGS WERE ALIEN ARTIFACTS, BUT NOT GHOSTS.

HAPPENS IN OUR LINE OF WORK. WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE?

I HAVE TO BUILD A GREAT MACHINE OUT OF MYSTERIUM. EVER HEAR OF IT?

ARE--ARE YOU DOING A BIT?

NIDAVELLIR, HOME OF THE SMITHS OF ASGARD.

THANKS FOR THE HOSPITALITY, ZLUSK.

YES, WELL, EITRI WAS HERE, BUT HE AIN'T NO MORE. AND MUCH AS I'D LOVE TO HELP YOU OUT AND HELP MYSELF TO YOUR LEFTOVER MYSTERIUM...

...AND IT DOESN'T HURT YOU THAT YOU CARRY LETTERS FROM THOR AND THE AVENGERS...

...OUR FORGES TOOK SO MUCH DAMAGE THAT I'M NOT SURE THEY CAN EVEN BE REPAIRED.*

*SEE RECENT ISSUES OF **CARNAGE!** --DS

I KNOW YOU'RE SKEPTICAL OF OUR CAPABILITIES, BUT WE APPRECIATE YOU LETTING US TAKE A SWING.

CAN'T SAY I LIKE THE LOOK OF THOSE SMILES.

AWRIGHT, THEN, LET'S SEE WHAT YOU GOT.

IF YOU CAN RELIGHT THESE FORGES, THEN YOU CAN BUILD YOUR SHIPS HERE. AND I'LL HAVE THAT MYSTERIUM DEPOSIT.

THE HEART OF THIS PLACE IS COLD.

NOTHING HAS BEEN SMITHED HERE FOR MANY TURNS OF THIS ROCK.

I'M GOING TO MAKE SOME MACHINES THAT WILL MAKE MORE MACHINES.

COOL. I'LL START REPAIRING THE STRUCTURE.

HAVE YOUR PEOPLE UNLOAD THE MYSTERIUM.

YOU TWO ARE CRAZY-- YOU CAN'T EVEN SMITH THAT METAL!

I MADE A NECKLACE OUT OF IT FOR A VERY DISCERNING WOMAN. A MUCH HARDER TASK THAN "SPACESHIPS."

MANY DAYS LATER.

WELL, WELL! THE DWARVES CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS!

QUITE A FEAT.

AND WE DIDN'T EVEN LEARN HOW TO FORGE MYSTERIUM...

I THINK OUR HOSTS ARE RECONSIDERING OUR ARRANGEMENT.

IS THAT YOUR WOMAN'S INTUITION OR THOSE RINGS OF POWER ON YOUR HAND?

I APPRECIATE YOU OFFERING TO SHARE YOUR MYSTERIUM--

HEY!

--BUT WE TALKED IT OVER, AND WE'D RATHER KEEP IT ALL!

AND WHICHEVER ONE OF YOU SPILLS YOUR SECRETS CAN LIVE--BUT WE DON'T NEED YOU BOTH!

KRAKOOM!

MAN, #$%& YOU.

DON'T COME ANY CLOSER!

YOU CAN'T TALK YERSELF OUT OF A HAMMERIN'!

NO, YOU FOOL!

YOU ACTIVATED MY AUTOMATIC DEFENSE LEG!

I TAUGHT MY ARTIFICIAL LEG ALL THE BEST COMBAT ON EARTH--IT LITERALLY HAS A MIND OF ITS OWN.

KRAK

AARGH!

YOU SHOULD'VE ABIDED BY OUR BARGAIN.

NOW YOU CAN THINK ABOUT THAT--

--IN THE VOID!

IRONHEART...

UH, THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY... LOOK AT THEM.

YOU CAN FEED THEM TO THE VOID. MAYBE THEY EVEN DESERVE IT, BUT YOU DON'T DESERVE LIVING WITH IT.

LISTEN, RIRI. YOU'RE NOT TOO YOUNG TO MAKE BIG-TIME REGRETS.

IF YOU WON'T LISTEN TO THAT ALIEN FALKOR GUY-- THEN LISTEN TO GUYS LIKE STARK AND MYSELF.

SIGH

MERCY!

I'M GONNA GO AHEAD AND GUESS YOU SAID YOU WOULD STUDY THE RINGS TO UNDERSTAND THEM.

BINGO.

AND I MEANT EVERY WORD. WHAT AM I GONNA DO? I CAN FEEL MYSELF GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH THEM. I'M NOT SCARED ANYMORE...

...AND *THAT* SCARES ME.

AND I DON'T KNOW WHO "FALKOR" IS.

THAT DOESN'T MATTER RIGHT NOW. HE'S ON EARTH WAITING FOR YOU WHEN YOU HAVE A NIGHT OFF.

BACK ON TOPIC--I HAVE AN IDEA ABOUT THE RINGS, IF YOU'RE GAME.

A LITTLE WHILE LATER.

I KNOW IT SOUNDS CRAZY.

NO CRAZIER THAN DECORATING MYSELF IN ALIEN GHOSTS. JUST AS LONG AS I WON'T KNOW WHERE THE RINGS FLY TO, RIGHT?

YES.

RIGHT. I DON'T WANT TO KNOW.

ACTIVATE YOUR CRAZY SEXTANT.

MAYBE THEY'LL END UP WHERE THEY'RE *NEEDED.*

WHAT IF THEY END UP BACK ON EVIL HANDS?

WOULDN'T BE YOUR FAULT. BESIDES, THE MACHINE WAS DESIGNED TO SPREAD THEM AROUND THE GALAXY.

YA KNOW... I DIDN'T LEARN A DAMN THING.

REALLY? NOT EVEN ABOUT *YOURSELF?*

LET'S FINISH THESE "SHIPS" AND THEN GET BACK INTO THE FIGHT.

It was ironic that the great mutant builder showed up in this story. We had both committed the same sin of selling great weapons to lesser souls.

Not long after Ironheart and Forge succeeded at the Dwarves' forge, my ships were landing on **Arakko.**

They made sure to stop in full view of Orchis' satellites.

Then it was on to Earth.

The one marble worth everything. We *wanted* Orchis to see us coming…

…and **Firestar** made sure of that.

The X-Men had managed to trick Orchis into accepting her as one of their own.

AND WHEN HE IS THROUGH OUR DEFENSES, HIS BEACHHEAD WILL BE THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK.

BY THEIR RECKONING, THE LOCATION HAS BEEN CHOSEN TO MINIMIZE COLLATERAL DAMAGE.

I HAVE A SECRET LINE OF DIALOGUE WITH THE MUTANT RESISTANCE ON EARTH. I TOOK CREDIT FOR SOMETHING MYSTIQUE DID--FREEING THE JUGGERNAUT, SO I HAVE THEIR TRUST.

STARK HAS BEEN PLAYING POSSUM AND HAS DESIGNED SHIPS CAPABLE OF WITHSTANDING OUR CAPITAL GUNS ON VENUS, THE EARTH AND THE MOON.

THE X-MEN AND THE AVENGERS ARE SO ALIKE.

WHEN STARK'S SHIPS ARRIVE IN THE OUTBACK--*EVERY* SENTINEL ON EARTH WILL BE WAITING FOR THEM.

THEN, IF HE DOESN'T JOIN AS AN OFFICIAL MASCOT, I'LL MAKE HIM WATCH RHODEY DIE, AND THEN I THINK I'LL TRAP HIM INSIDE AN ARMOR HE CAN'T COMMAND.

ONE WITH FULL LIFE SUPPORT, TO SEE HOW LONG HE LASTS.

I knew Feilong was motivated by his hatred of mutants and of me. But it blinded him to the danger under his nose.

Orchis was an amalgamation of human interests…and artificial intelligence with their own designs.

NO REASON TO TEMPT FATE. FEILONG IS PRIDEFUL, AND STARK IS... DANGEROUS.

NIMROD?

YOU HEARD MOIRA-- KILL FEILONG'S PET AVENGER.

The Mark 72 was almost done, and it would be tested in the field.

Also, you'd think when you had solved for death that you'd be more considerate about retrieving Weapon X corpses, but the X-Men were real litterbugs.

Okay, who's ready to meet the Mark 72 armor?

SNIKT!

NEXT:
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN VERSUS THE ADAMANTIUM CLAWS OF ORCHIS!

#15: MARK 72: ONLINE!

Months ago, James Rhodes was framed and arrested on an intel-gathering mission that unearthed a terrible truth: Orchis isn't planning to stop with mutants--they have every hero on Earth in their sights. O-Day is here, and Orchis has dispatched a new breed of Sentinel to make sure that Iron Man never makes it to the battle. The time has come for Tony Stark to lay his cards on the table. Luckily, he's got a brand-new armor up his sleeve!

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KAMIC RIDER

MARIKA